
STATEMENT OF THE LEADER

**UK Core Cities Meeting with Michel Barnier and the House of Commons
Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee**

On 19 February 2018, along with the other leaders of the UK Core Cities and Daniël Termont, the President of Eurocities, I met with Michel Barnier, the EU's Chief Negotiator for Brexit and Guy Verhofstadt, the EU Parliament's representative for Brexit. The UK Core Cities made clear that economies flow between cities, not just nations, often acting as drivers of national wealth. This was therefore an important opportunity to emphasise the role of cities within and beyond Brexit, and the need to involve city leaders in informing discussions that will impact on the ability of cities to generate and share opportunity.

The meeting in Brussels also allowed the Core Cities to argue the case for citizens, rather than nations, retaining EU citizenship as well as underlining the importance of cities, their institutions and UK parliaments retaining the ability to 'buy-in' to collaborative programmes. The development of Regional and city-to-city strategies post-Brexit was also discussed with the Core Cities advocating the establishment of a joint Cities Commission between UK and EU cities to oversee transition on issues that specifically affect cities. As a result of this meeting, the Core Cities gained a commitment from Guy Verhofstadt to hold an evidence session of the EU Parliament on the role of cities during and post Brexit. The Core Cities will now be seeking for the UK Government to engage much more closely with cities on these issues.

In addition, the House of Commons Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (PACAC) is currently conducting an inquiry into Devolution and Exiting the European Union (EU). The inquiry is looking at the immediate aspects of EU withdrawal and the long-term implications for constitutional arrangements. This would include devolved governance issues and inter-institutional relations in the UK. The main purpose of this evidence session will be to explore the impact and implications of exiting the EU for devolution in England. Nevertheless, on 20 March 2018, I provided evidence to the Committee on behalf of the Core Cities, setting out that the ten UK Core Cities have a combined total population in their urban areas of 20 million and are responsible for around 25% of the UK economy, slightly more than London. They also account for 29% of UK trade exports and are home to almost 40% of the UK university population.

The Core Cities recognise the decision to leave the EU was driven, in part, by call from the electorate for greater control over the decisions that affect their lives and the way their money is spent in the places where they live. However, despite the

progress on devolution, the UK remains one of the most centralised states in the developed world, with the typical UK city controlling only 7% of the total taxes raised within its boundaries. At the local level in North America, it is nearer 50%; in Germany, 35%; and, across the OECD, it is an average of 25%. It is therefore important that powers and resources returning from the EU to the UK must not stop at Westminster, or even Holyrood and Cardiff Bay. They must be devolved to the local level, particularly as there is a link between the levels of local financial control and the productivity of a city. This is significant, because the UK's cities are not as productive as they should be and, if they performed just at the UK average, it would put an extra £70-90billion a year into the UK economy.

Channel 4

On 8 March 2018, Channel 4 announced that they were going to increase spending in the nations and regions of the UK, and establish a new national HQ outside of London alongside two smaller, regional creative hubs in 2019. These will accommodate up to 300 jobs, including key decision-makers, with the intention to grow this figure over time. In addition, the company's press release also committed Channel 4 to a new studio and a new Channel 4 news bureau in the nations and regions. The "4 All the UK" strategy could see a significant jobs boost across the nations and regions, with Channel 4 set to increase spend on its regional contents from its current quota of 35% to a new voluntary target of 50% by 2023. This will provide a boost of over £250 million to Channel 4's commissioning spend in the regions of the UK and could have a significant impact on the independent creative sector in Cardiff and the wider city-region.

Cardiff is well-placed to bid for this new investment and, on 9 March 2018, I wrote to the Chief Executive of Channel 4 to submit an initial expression of interest from Cardiff, which confirmed our intention to submit a bid. We understand that UK cities will be invited to submit formal bids from as early as April 2018, with a potential decision to be made by Channel 4 in September 2018.

I am pleased to say that the Cardiff Capital Region Joint Cabinet is supportive of a Cardiff bid. I have written to the Welsh Government Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Transport and the Secretary of State for Wales seeking their support for a Cardiff bid. I also intend to work with the creative sector to bring a small steering group together who can help in developing a Cardiff proposition.

What we don't yet know is whether any invitation to bid will be a select one or if the bid process will be open to all cities and regions across the UK. I am currently planning to meet with Channel 4 and hope to be able to confirm the position shortly. In the meantime, I have been meeting companies and influencers, both within Wales and outside of Wales, who may have some insight into the process to be adopted by Channel 4 and, in doing so, identifying the key investment criteria that will form part of Cardiff's eventual proposition to Channel 4. As soon as we have more information on the bidding process, I will report back to Council with a progress report.

Local Government Reform

On 20th March 2018, the Cabinet Secretary for Local Government and Public Services launched a Green Paper consultation document entitled, "Strengthening Local Government: Delivering for People". I welcome this constructive approach from the minister. The case for stronger councils is one that I have made myself, and Cardiff has already outlined a range of new powers which would support the city's development. It is good to see discussion on extended powers for Local Government featuring in the Green Paper.

We will reflect carefully on the merger options to form a considered opinion. What is clear is that Cardiff is already by far the largest authority in Wales, and is growing faster than the rest of Wales put together. In the face of unprecedented and immediate demand challenges, my administration is getting on with delivering an ambitious agenda to make Cardiff a more equal, more prosperous city; a Capital that truly works for Wales. We would have concerns about any process of reorganisation, or indeed of regionalisation which distracted us from our delivery agenda, or which weakens the accountability of decision-makers to the citizens of Cardiff.

Severe Winter Weather

As Members will be aware, on 1 & 2 March 2018, Cardiff was hit by freezing wind, blizzards and drifting snow. The weather was so extreme that, for the first time, a Red weather warning was issued for Cardiff and South East Wales, meaning that there was a significant risk to public safety.

During the exceptional weather, Council staff worked around the clock, battling very difficult conditions to deliver essential services and ensure that our citizens were looked after. Our Winter Maintenance Team gritted 5,460km of road with 750 tonnes of salt. The Council's Meals on Wheels team delivered 335 hot meals. The hard work of Registration Services ensured that all weddings and funerals took place. The Responsive Repairs unit carried out 390 emergency repairs for our Council tenants. C2C staff provided telephone and online support to citizens, speaking to 598 customers.

In the days following the snow, I was pleased to have the opportunity to visit many of the teams involved and to acknowledge their dedication, hard work and determination to deliver for the people of Cardiff. I am extremely proud of what staff achieved and the spirit that they showed.

On behalf of all my Cabinet colleagues, I would again like to thank every single officer who played their part in what was a truly fantastic team effort. The 'One Council' approach demonstrated throughout this period made clear to everyone that "Working For You" is more than just a Capital Ambition slogan.

Community Cohesion

It was with great pride that I joined the annual march against racism on Saturday 17 March from Grange Gardens to City Hall. The march celebrated United Nations Day Against Racism and took place at the same time as other marches in Glasgow and London, as well as in other cities around the world. We must

recognise too that there are some – a small minority – in our city who do not share our values of freedom, tolerance and democracy. It is therefore important that we all re-affirm our commitment to making Cardiff the tolerant and inclusive Capital that we are all proud of.

Councillor Huw Thomas
Leader of the Council
21 March 2018